



KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE

Ad Hoc Commission Headlines at the Watson Institute

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With a view to facilitating valuable face-to-face working time for the AAA Ad Hoc Commission on the Engagement of Anthropology With the US Security and Intelligence Communities, and extending its own institutional dialogue on culture in the military, the prestigious Watson Institute for International Studies at Brown University opened its doors to the commission for a two-day event on March 12–13.

the same time, the visit opened a useful partnership with the Watson Institute, particularly its politics, culture and identity program, which is spearheading a special research project on cultural awareness in the military.

An exchange between faculty from Brown, Rhode Island College, Salve Regina University, Boston University, Williams College and the Naval War College, and a public panel featuring four commission members afforded the commission opportunities to connect with an interdisciplinary community of national security scholars and practitioners whose views both challenged and enriched the commission's ongoing dialogue.

During three supplementary, closed-door working sessions, commission members were able to fine-tune their research approach and examine preliminary ethnographic data, mapping out its next steps.

Among the most salient points during public discussions was a consideration of how the principles "do no harm" and "do some good" require contextualization in their application to anthropological engagement in intelligence/national security work. Discussion of the

former, a linchpin ethical standard for the discipline, centered on the "taxonomies" of engagement that would help clarify the circumstances under which an anthropologist would/would not be doing harm. Discussion of the latter centered on what "doing good" might mean—for instance, reducing the distance between, say, a

military operative and the "other," or helping military/intelligence personnel frame ethical boundaries for deploying cultural knowledge. This ethnographic lens added more complexity and nuance to the broader, contested issue of "engagement vs no engagement."

The cross-faculty exchange generated moments of what amounted to an endorsement of the commission's ethnographic approach. Several participants noted anthropology's ironic tendency to paint the intelligence/national security sector (including military) as a monolithic entity with a homogenous operational culture.

AAA member David Edwards of Williams College, who spent five years living in Afghanistan and working with refugees in Pakistan, suggested that this default bias prevents many in the anthropology community from grasping the immense diversity in the kinds of roles practicing anthropologists assume in intelligence/national security work. Edwards and David Kreibitz, an anthropologist on the faculty of the Naval War College, agreed that anthropologists have an ethnographic obligation to understand the sector for what it is. Accordingly, the commission's strategy to task its subcommittees on practitioners and institutions with carrying out a bit of ethnographic fieldwork along these lines was widely praised.

More generally, the issue of *how* the discipline (and the association) has conducted the dialogue on engagement in intelligence/national security work emerged somewhat regularly during the two days at the Watson Institute. There was a clear consensus that the dialogue has lacked civility on occasion, and that there was a "political space" problem. Some speculated that it is anthropology's concern for marginalization and the marginalized that continues to trigger the heightened sensitivities of many AAA members to all things military.

Others suggested that the presumed historical record of US imperialism has long provided anthropologists with a rationale for rejecting any affiliation with intelligence/national security entities because it simply taints the discipline. In any case, virtually all participants in the cross-faculty meeting expressed hope that a more respectful and balanced conversation would unfold on these issues, and that the commission could be a vehicle for cultivating a more accommodating political space. ■



Commission Chair James Peacock presides over a packed auditorium during a panel discussion on "Security, Loyalty and Social Science" at the Watson Institute for International Studies, Brown University, on March 12. Commission members (L to R) Carolyn Fluehr-Lobban, Robert Albro and Laura McNamara are also pictured. Photo courtesy of Paul Nuti

The Watson Institute sponsored the commission's visit at a critically important time, for the commission's deliberations—on key ethical, practical and institutional dimensions of anthropological engagement—have begun to round into form as they prepare for an interim report to the AAA Executive Board in June. At



ON ANTHROPOLOGY AND US SECURITY/INTELLIGENCE

SAR Hosts Seminar on the Anthropology of Military and National Security Organizations

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Ever wondered what might come up in a discussion among anthropologists who study violence, and anthropologists who work in and around national security and defense institu-

tions? Maybe you haven't—but that's exactly the conversation that took place over two days in February at the School of Advanced Research on the Human Experience (SAR, formerly the School of American Research) in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

At the invitation of SAR President James Brooks, Laura McNamara and Neil Whitehead co-chaired

an SAR short seminar that brought together a diverse group of scholars with experience studying defense, national security, warfare and violence throughout the world. The seminar's purpose was to engage anthropologists who work inside, for, or on behalf of the apparatus of state power with those in direct discussion with

anthropologists studying violence as a cultural universal.

Participants included Brian Ferguson, professor of anthropology at Rutgers University; Eric Haanstad, a doctoral candidate from the University of Wisconsin and current SAR Weatherhead Fellow; Robert Rubinstein, professor of anthropology and international relations at the Maxwell School of Syracuse University; and Anne Irwin, chair of civil-military relations at the University of Calgary in Canada. In addition, McNamara and colleague David Price of St Martin's College represented the ongoing AAA Ad-Hoc Commission on the Engagement of Anthropologists With the US Security and Intelligence Communities.

The seminar was something of an adventure, since none of the participants were entirely sure how to define what (if any) common territory might be worth exploring in two days. To kick off the discussions, McNamara and Whitehead asked participants to consider a set of general themes, including the changing relationship between anthropology and institutions of power; anthropological theories of violence; and the politics of anthropologists, who tend to be liberal in their political leanings. In addition, Canadian colleague Anne Irwin—who recently conducted anthropological field research among Canadian infantry soldiers deployed in a combat role in Afghanistan—urged us to consider how national traditions shape distinctive relationships between the pen and the sword in different countries.

From those launching points, participants dove into two days of frank and wide-ranging discussion. Our exchanges drew heavily on fieldwork and research experience to explore anthropology

as a field in transition, from a primarily academic endeavor with a focus on area studies, to a more repatriated discipline peopled by members who are increasingly engaged with powerful institutions in both private and public sectors.

In comparing fieldwork experiences—applied and academic, abroad and at home, past and present—we discovered rich veins of thematic contrast and similarity. Whitehead and Ferguson's ideas about violence in the tribal zone resonated in fascinating ways with Haanstad's fieldwork among Thai police, as well as Irwin's experience among enlisted Canadian soldiers deployed in Afghanistan.

In turn, Irwin and Rubinstein's expertise in peacekeeping operations helped challenge taken-for-granted assumptions about the relationship between militarism and state violence. Similarly, David Price's critique of secrecy in anthropology and McNamara's experience studying people who work in high-security environments acted as contrasting touchstones for comparing and debating parallels and divergences in academic and applied anthropology. Of particular interest throughout the discussions were the stories and photos that Irwin brought from her recent fieldwork in a combat zone.

Not surprisingly, the conversations touched repeatedly on the hard facts of the present. As scholars, we are producing knowledge in a time of war. Moreover, the institutions comprising the military and intelligence communities throughout the US, Canada and Europe seem increasingly interested in drawing on the expertise of social scientists in general, and anthropologists in particular. Seminar participants spent a great deal of time exploring how we each have defined and maintained ethical lines as we engage in various field sites, and whether or not the ethics of engage-

ment vary depending on whether a war is collectively defined as "just" or "unjust."



In doing so, we discussed what it might mean for anthropologists to have an "impact" on state institutions, and whether or not it is possible to discern any impact as specifically anthropological in nature. We also considered the tradeoff between the risks of engagement in ethically fraught environments, and the benefits to the discipline from knowledge produced therein. Price's historical research contrasted with other participants' ongoing fieldwork experiences to create a lively context for our discussions of present-day anthropological involvement in and around a range of field sites—from intelligence analysts, to dark shamans, to UN peacekeepers and Thai police officers.

So—do anthropologists trying to understand the causes of violence have much to discuss with anthropologists studying, critiquing or working in and around defense and security institutions? The answer was a resounding yes. In fact, the discussions were so exciting and enlightening that the participants decided to assemble a proposal for an expanded SAR Advanced Seminar for 2008 so that we can revisit the many themes left unexplored in two short days in Santa Fe. ■

Laura A McNamara is a member of the AAA Ad Hoc Commission on the Engagement of Anthropology With US Security and Intelligence Communities. She and the SAR seminar participants thank their gracious hosts at SAR, including James Brooks, Nancy Owen-Lewis and Catherine Cocks. A special thanks to Leslie Shipman and her crew of gourmet cooks, who sustained their discussions with fabulous food.

STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING HEALTH CARE

Closing the Gap Between Doctors and Patients

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In the consulting work my colleagues and I have carried out over the past few years we have found ourselves continually recommending to the medical establishment—doctors, pharmaceutical companies, HMOs—that it invest greater effort in attempting to understand the ways in which patients frame and experience various conditions and diseases. We continually advise consideration of the specific folk models of illness that guide patient behavior, in effect making a plea for cultural analysis and anthropological understanding.

We have been attempting to provide a baseline cultural grammar of the meanings diseases like hypertension, diabetes and arthritis have for patients and how these meanings form patients' experiences of and attempts to cope with their conditions. We have found that each condition or disease state is its own universe of meaning.

Importance of Effective Communication

My case studies show that effective communication with patients can sometimes be as important as correct diagnosis. Indeed doctors have to be good salesmen for their positions if they wish their advice to be taken seriously, for it to have the necessary authority. In order to do this they should understand the cultural factors that influence the patient mindset.

As importantly, patients' lengthy, often times circular and anecdotal narratives provide a way for doctors to incorporate aspects of the patient's folk perspective into the therapeutic process. These narratives should not be squashed short in order simply to relate the medical facts to the patient. To do so would indicate that doctors are simply interested in an attenuated form of condition management, one that eschews patients' understanding of what I have called wellness.

For instance, in our study of hypertension we found that getting the high blood pressure numbers down was only one half of the patient's goal; creating a life in emotional balance was the

patient's "wellness goal." Patients were absolutely convinced that stress and emotional imbalance were the root causes of hypertension rather than heredity, diet or being overweight.

Patients were in effect resisting the doctor's approach, not only because dieting and exercising and taking ones' medication are sometimes difficult, but also because they were being silenced. They were in effect being told that their interpretations and feelings should not be part of the therapeutic process. To improve the doctor/patient relationship we suggested that doctors work toward helping patients achieve wellness in tandem with getting the blood pressure numbers down.

In our study of hypertension we recommended that doctors engage with patients more meaningfully by allowing time for what could be called patient storytelling—realizing that patient anecdotes could contain insight that could make or break a mutually satisfactory doctor-patient relationship.

See *Closing the Gap* on page 26